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**Laurence Connell**

Charles Moore

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LAURENCE CONNELL

Prepared for:  
History 500  
Armstrong State College  
and  
The Georgia Historical Society

By  
Charles Moore

ABSTRACT

Laurence Connell immigrated from Ireland and arrived in Savannah in 1837. He was a shopkeeper and held a number of public offices, both elective and appointive: Constable, Magistrate or Justice of the Peace, Port Warden, Notary, Member of the Board of Health, and Chief Bailiff of the County Court. Indications are that he left Savannah in 1890. There is no record of any living descendants.

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Irish immigrant from Dublin.<sup>4</sup> Like Laurence, Mary's past is unclear. There seems to be some connection with a Fitzgerald family in Savannah and it is possible that that could be her maiden name.<sup>5</sup>

### LIFE IN SAVANNAH

The Connells arrived in Savannah in 1837 and began raising a family.<sup>6</sup> Soon after their arrival they opened a store and began a career as tradesmen that they would follow more or less regularly for the next fifty-three years.<sup>7</sup>

By 1845 Laurence was appointed a deputy sheriff and served in that or a similar capacity through at least 1850.<sup>8</sup> This was but the first in a series of elective and appointed public positions that he would hold.

In 1853 he was elected as a Justice of the Peace for a one year term and reelected in 1854 and 1855.<sup>9</sup> In 1856 he entered the race for Ordinary of Chatham County but later withdrew.<sup>10</sup> In 1857 Laurence was again elected Justice of the Peace (Magistrate), one of eight for the City, and reelected annually through 1863.<sup>11</sup>

In 1863 the War between the States dominated the thinking of Savannah. Preparations were being made to defend the city. The city had been for a time divided administratively into four "Beats" for the purpose of electing Justices of the Peace and possibly for other purposes. Laurence Connell was

a member of a committee of thirty-five from the third beat charged with organizing the "arms bearing residents" to defend the city.<sup>12</sup> The mayor, Thomas Holcombe, issued a proclamation that businesses would close Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 2 P.M. for drill.<sup>13</sup>

The preparations for defense proved fruitless and this city fell to Sherman's army and civilian government was suspended. On August 12, 1865 by a proclamation of the Provisional Governor of Georgia, James Johnson, certain local government agencies were to resume. Laurence Connell was one of seven Magistrates for Chatham County that went back to work.<sup>14</sup> He was reelected to that position through 1868.<sup>15</sup>

Laurence Connell also served as Port Warden for a number of years. The exact nature of his duties is unclear. The office had originated at the time of the War of 1812 and my first impression was that the office was concerned with the security of facilities and cargo in the Port of Savannah. The Supreme Court case of Cooley v. Board of Port Wardens, though of another locality and time, gives a much wider view of those duties, to encompass all operations of the port. Port Wardens were elected by the City Council. It is assumed that this position was the most important one held by Laurence Connell. He served as Port Warden 1856-1859, 1863-1865, and 1870-1873.<sup>16</sup>

He also served on the Board of Health in 1862, 1864, and 1866.<sup>17</sup> As the term of office is unclear this might represent continuous service for six years, except for any break

occasioned by the Union Occupation.

In May 1866, Laurence was named Chief Bailiff of the County Court. The length of time he held that post is unknown.<sup>18</sup>

In 1877 Laurence Connell lost an election for Magistrate to W. H. Doowhouse, a man of color, by a vote of 536 to 195.<sup>19</sup> This seems to be the end of his political career. Changing times and population patterns seem to have taken their political toll. Laurence's record as Magistrate or Justice of the Peace does not seem to have been one to court the black vote.

The last public job Laurence held was as a "turn key" at the police barracks at the age of sixty-four. His political life had ended.<sup>20</sup>

Laurence worked for a time as a Clerk in a store owned by his son Richard and took over the store after Richard's death in 1888 and operated it in partnership with his other son for about two years.<sup>21</sup>

#### THE CONNELL FAMILY RESIDENCES

The first recorded address for the Connells in Savannah is simply Whitaker Street. Perhaps they shared a residence with the Fitzgeralds also recorded as living on Whitaker Street. A more than casual relationship is indicated by a funeral notice for Mr. Fitzgerald issued jointly by



Edward Fitzgerald and family, and Laurence Connell and family.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, Edward Fitzgerald was buried in the Connell family plot.<sup>23</sup> The Connell family was definitely residing on Whitaker Street from 1849-1851.<sup>24</sup>

By 1848 Laurence Connell had an interest in Lot 71, Crawford Ward and by 1851 construction was underway on a house at that location.<sup>25</sup> An ad in 1853 for a house on Liberty Street for rent indicates that the Connells may not have moved in when their house was complete.<sup>26</sup> They are definitely located on Liberty Street in 1858 and remained there until 1888.<sup>27</sup> In the latter part of 1888 Laurence, his wife Mary and son Edward moved to 75½ Broughton Street.<sup>28</sup> The house on Liberty Street was used in part as a store from 1869-1879 and probably from the date they moved in through 1879.<sup>29</sup>

#### THE CONNELL CHILDREN

In 1837 the Connells had their first child, a daughter, Bridget Ann who died on October 39, 1851 from Scarlet Fever.<sup>30</sup> A sister Mary Ellen was born that year and died on September 29, 1851 at the age of five months.<sup>31</sup> The death of both daughters coming so close together would seem sufficient grief for one family, but there were other sorrows. Laurence J. Connell, their eldest son was born in 1842 and served as a soldier in the War between the States. He became ill, was hospitalized, and recuperated in Savannah for approximately one

year before returning to the 18th Georgia Battalion in Virginia.<sup>32</sup> He returned safely from the War and took up residence with his family. He was elected as a weigher of hay by the City Council in 1866 and continued in that capacity until his death from encephalitis in 1871 at the age of twenty-nine.<sup>33</sup>

Richard C. Connell was born in 1848 and seemed fairly active in organizations in the city.<sup>34</sup> He was a member of the drill team for Company A of the Savannah Volunteer Guard (18th Georgia Battalion) and the Recording Secretary of the Saint Patrick's Total Abstinence and Beneficial Society.<sup>35</sup> On January 30, 1877 at approximately 3 A.M. Richard and a friend, James Doyle, were in a saloon and in a friendly scuffle over an air rifle Richard was shot in the head.<sup>36</sup> It was feared that he would soon die. This was not the case, for while the ball lodged in his brain proved to be fatal, it was to take eleven years. Richard was afflicted by the accident with impaired speech and nervous twitches on his right side.<sup>37</sup> Richard was able to continue working for a period of time as a clerk; bookkeeper, photo finisher, or portrait artist.<sup>38</sup> In 1884 or 1885 he opened a shop on Bryan Street which evolved into a ten cent store.<sup>39</sup> Various members of his family worked with him until his death in 1888.<sup>40</sup> The business was continued until 1890 by his father and brother as L. Connell & Co.<sup>41</sup>

Edward J. Connell was born in 1852 and like his brothers, served for a time in the Savannah Volunteer Guards and was a member of the drill team.<sup>42</sup> Edward worked for a number of years as a carpenter on the railroad but also worked for a time with

his father and brother Richard at the Bryan Street store.<sup>43</sup>  
Edward died in 1921, the victim of a hit and run driver.<sup>44</sup>

Michael Connell may be a son or other relative of Laurence Connell. The single connection is that in 1890 he is connected with the Bryan Street store listed as L., E. J., and M. Connell and living with Laurence and Edward J. Connell at 75 $\frac{1}{2}$  Broughton Street.<sup>45</sup> He was not included in the 1860 census and the 1870 census did not yield information on the Connell family. (The census is not indexed and the possibility exists that the Connells were overlooked.)

The funeral notice of Richard's death indicates that he was "survived by a brother (Edward) and aged parents."<sup>46</sup>

#### LAURENCE AND MARY CONNELL

Mary Connell seemed to have had little individual public identity apart from her family. The only public record of her as an individual were three listings in the city directories and her funeral notice in the paper.<sup>47</sup> She died in 1890 of heart disease after burying four of her five children and leaving the home she had obviously worked hard to maintain.

Laurence Connell's life apart from his official functions is also somewhat of an inigma. The newspaper accounts are somewhat sterile but the impression is of a man limited in ability trying to establish his family in a new country.

From 1854-1873 he was a man of some prominence, maintaining an official office, sometimes in the City Exchange Building, and involved in politics and the affairs of the community. His monetary remuneration from these positions could not have been great but as a supplement to the income from the family store probably allowed the family some small luxuries.

It seems probably that he had some relatives in this country and after the death of his wife in 1888 left Chatham County around 1890.<sup>48</sup> After working for fifty-three years in Savannah he left at the age of seventy-five, probably no richer than when he arrived.

#### RECORDS AT THE BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS

The records located in the Health Department on

Eisenhower Drive contain the death certificates for:

Bridget A. Connell - Residence Whitaker Street, Perceval Ward - 10/30, 1851 - W - Age 14 - Savannah Resident - Scarlet Fever - Dr. Arnold.

Laurence J. Connell - Liberty Street - 4/2, 1871 - W - M - Age 29 - Savannah - Encephelitis - Dr. Nunn - Buried in Cathedral Cemetery.

R. C. Connell - No. 72 Liberty Street - 4/16, 1888 - W - Age 39 - Strophy of Brain - Dr. W. Duncan - Buried at the Cathedral Cemetery Lot No. 98 D.

Mary E. Connell - Whitaker Street, Heathcote Ward - 9/29, 1851 - W - 5 months - Savannah Resident - Infantile - Dr. Cawahl.

Edward J. Connell - Reg. No. 2066 - 11/30/21 - Run over by a car. /

### BIRTH RECORDS

There are no recorded births in the name of Connell with the father listed as Laurence J., Richard C., Edward J., or Michael Connell.

There are records of birth for:

Barbra Connell - 4/19/28 - Edward L. Connell and Hattie E. (nee) Wells.

Ralph Everett Connell - 10/5/22 - Ed. C. Connell and Hattie E. (nee) Wells.

There is of course no possibility of these being the children of Edward J. Connell but due to the similarity in names and dates, it is possible that a missing generation exists.

There are no recorded births for the children of either Barbra or Ralph Everett Connell.

### MARRIAGE RECORDS

(Probate Court Room 425 Chatham County Courthouse)

A search of the records index showed no record of marriage for:

Laurence Connell  
Lawrence J. Connell  
Richard C. Connell  
Edward J. Connell  
Barbra Connell  
Ralph Everett Connell

Spelling variations of Connell, Connel and O'Connell were checked along with reasonable variations in first names and initials.

## RECORD OF WILLS

The only record is of the estate of Edward J. Connell, a copy of which is on the following page. Laurence Connell provided for his family by selling all his possessions to his family (see following section on Property Records).

## PROPERTY RECORDS (Chatham County Courthouse Rm 301)

The property records at the Courthouse are somewhat confusing when it comes to the transactions of Laurence Connell. The Grantee index shows him acquiring interests in several properties and in effect mortgaging them, but the Grantor index does not show him selling property. It is to be assumed that in most cases Laurence lost the properties. The search is confounded by the fact that book 3L is missing and the index refers to that volume three times, (Vol. 3L, pp. 130, 479, and 527).

During the period of 1848-1852 Laurence Connell granted several deeds to secure debt. Probably the money was used to finance the construction of his home at 212 East Liberty Street (current address). They are as follows:

Vol. 3F, p. 188, August 3, 1848, Lot 71 Crawford Ward (Liberty Street), Amount \$250.00.

Vol. 3H, p. 387, March 27, 1851, Lot 71 Crawford Ward, Amount \$1,000.00.

Vol. 3I, pp. 165-166, May 3, 1851, Lot 40 Green Ward (corner of East Broad and Oglethorpe), Amount \$1,200.00.

State of Georgia,  
Chatham County.

Court of Ordinary

THE HONORABLE THE ORDINARY OF SAID COUNTY:

The Petition of Clayton D. Lee  
aid County, respectfully shows that Edw. J. Bonnell departed this life on  
30 day of Nov. 1921, intestate, leaving an estate consisting of  
property, worth about (\$ 200<sup>00</sup> ) Two Hundred Dollars  
the heirs of Estate are unknown to petitioner

it he is a friend of the said deceased,  
I desires to administer temporarily on said estate, in terms of the law. Wherefore, Petitioner  
ay P. that Temporary Letters of Administration may be granted to him according to law.  
December 3 1921.

Clayton D. Lee  
604 Habersham St

COURT OF ORDINARY  
Chatham County

Upon reading the foregoing petition and it appearing that the facts as therein stated are true:  
is, Therefore, considered and ordered that Temporary Letters do issue to

Clayton D. Lee upon the estate of  
Edw. J. Bonnell Deceased,  
pon his entering into bond in the sum of (\$ 400<sup>00</sup> )  
Four Hundred Dollars,

to be by me approved, and taking and subscribing the oath as prescribed by law.

December 3 1921.

J. D. Norland  
Ordinary Chatham County, Ga.

Vol. 3I, p. 418, April 6, 1852, Lot 71 Crawford Ward, apparently a refinancing.

Vol. 3I, pp. 441-442, April 23, 1852, Lot 14 (?), (Purse Street), Amount \$350.00.

Vol. 3K, p. 306, August 24, 1852, Lot 40 Green Ward, Amount \$660.00.

In Vol. 4C, p. 649 Laurence Connell sold to his family for the sum of five dollars all of his possessions on May 22, 1869. Among the possessions were included the stock in trade in a store on Liberty Street between Lincoln and Abercorn Street, Crawford Ward (now 212 East Liberty Street).

Grantees were Mary Connell, Laurence J. Connell, Richard C. Connell, and Edward J. Connell. Richard C. Connell was named as trustee. This document in effect replaced a will and had the added advantage of protecting the family possessions from creditors of Laurence Connell. It is interesting to note that no real property was included. This can be taken to mean that at that date Laurence Connell had no assignable interest in real property or that it was so heavily encumbered as to be seen as a burden rather than an asset.

The Schreck Records, Vol. 2, Crawford 71, showing the record of ownership are somewhat confusing. Laurence Connell is last shown as owner (Grantor) in 1853. From there on the Grantors are a succession of Loan Associations and individuals who do not match with the preceding Grantees. It is known that the Connells lived at that address until 1888 but it can not be stated unequivocally whether as a mortgage payer or tenant.



## THE CATHOLIC CEMETERY

The Burial Records, Vol. 1 and 2 list Edward J.; Laurence J.; Mary; and R. C. Connell, along with Edward Fitzgerald, as being interested in Section D, Lot 98. A visit to the cemetery proved that there are no stones or markers on that plot that refer to either a Connell or a Fitzgerald. After checking the index with the surrounding graves it can be determined that the corner plot is indeed Section D, Lot 98, and that no subsequent numbering system has been employed to confuse the issue. A discussion with personnel at the cemetery indicates that it was poorly maintained for many years and that if wooden markers had been used on the graves they could have been removed or destroyed. The grave site is near the entrance and it seems unlikely that any planned removal could have disturbed the graves. In short, there is little reason to doubt the accuracy of the records or the determination of the location of the grave site. Even though the lack of head stones is a disappointment.

The grave site, Section D, Lot 98, is on the Northeast corner of the first intersection as you enter the cemetery by the keepers building off Cwinette near Wheaton.

## ALTERNATE SPELLINGS

Laurence Connell is often listed as La(w)rence Connell with such frequency that it would be tedious to cite each

variation. Other variations are Conell (1850 Census) and  
O'Connell on one occasion in the Daily Morning News January 11,  
1858.

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>U.S. Census: 1860, Box C4 Chatham County, p. 2688, 1860 Census Index Chatham County, Georgia Census at G.H.S., Daily Georgian, 9/10, 1843, p. 2, C.5.
- <sup>2</sup>U.S. Census: 1850 p. 286 or 445, 1860 p. 2688.
- <sup>3</sup>Book A Chatham County Aliens Citizenship: 1801, 1851 at G.H.S.
- <sup>4</sup>U.S. Census: 1850, 1860.
- <sup>5</sup>Daily Morning News, 9/4, 1854, p. 2, C.2, see section on Cemetery p.
- <sup>6</sup>Alien Citizenship, Daily Morning News. 9/29, 1851, p. 2, C. 3.
- <sup>7</sup>The Georgian, 9/8, 1838, p. 2, C. 4, The Daily Georgian, 11/22, 1839, p. 2, C.5, 11/22, 1840, p. 2, C7, City Directory: 1870, 1877, 1879, 1885, 1888, 1889, 1890.
- <sup>8</sup>Savannah Morning News, 11/3, 1875, p. 3 Cs. 5/6, City Directory, 1849, 1850, Census 1850.
- <sup>9</sup>Daily Morning News, 8/17, 1853, p. 1, C. 1, 1/24, 1854, p. 1, C. 1, 1855 passim.
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid. 6/8, 1855, p. 2, C.5, 1/7, 1856, p. 3, C.2.
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid. 1/5, 1857, p. 2, C.2, 1861-1863, passim, City Directory, 1858, 1859, 1860.
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid. 8/5, 1863, p. 2, C.1.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid. 7/21, 1863, p. 1, C.1.
- <sup>14</sup>Savannah Daily Herald, 8/21, 1865, p. 3, C. 1.
- <sup>15</sup>Savannah Daily Herald, Daily News and Herald, passim.
- <sup>16</sup>Thomas Gamble, Jr., A History of the City Government of Savannah, Georgia: 1790-1901 (Savannah: City Council, 1900), Daily Morning News, 1/11, 1856, p. 2, C. 2/3, 7/2 1857, p.2, C.4. 1/15, 1863, p.2, C.1, Savannah Morning News, 1/6, 1872, p.3, C.1, City Directory, 1871, 1874.
- <sup>17</sup>Daily Morning News, 5/28, 1862, p.2, C.2, 7/8, 1863, p.2, C.4, 9/17, 1863, p.2, C.3, 7/8, 1864, p.2, C.3, Savannah Daily News and Herald, 3/21, 1866, p.2, C.3.

- <sup>18</sup>Daily News and Herald, 5/29, 1866, p. 3, C. 1.
- <sup>19</sup>Savannah Morning News, 1/8, 1877, p. 2, C. 3.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid. 11/27, 1879, p. 3, C. 4.
- <sup>21</sup>City Directory, 1885, 1886, 1883-1890.
- <sup>22</sup>Daily Morning News, 9/4, 1854, p. 2, C. 2.
- <sup>23</sup>Text, p. 13.
- <sup>24</sup>City Directory, 1849, 1850, Daily Morning News, 9/29 1851, p. 2, C. 3, 10/30, 1851, p. 2, C. 2.
- <sup>25</sup>Text, p. 10.
- <sup>26</sup>Daily Morning News, 7/30, 1853, p. 2, C. 5.
- <sup>27</sup>City Directory and Newspapers, passim. City Directory 1879, p. 178 indicates that the family resided at 69 Abercorn. As this is the only indication, it interrupts a long trend and as their residence on Liberty Street is close to Abercorn it is assumed that this entry is an error.
- <sup>28</sup>City Directory, 1888, p. 162, 1890, p. 187.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid. 1870, 1877, 1879, see page 12 of text.
- <sup>30</sup>Daily Morning News, 1851, p. 2, C. 2, Census, 1850, 1860.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid. 9/29, 1851, p. 2, C. 3, text p. 8.
- <sup>32</sup>Ibid. 7/14, 1863, p. 2, C. 2, 8/16, 184, p. 2, C. 1, Census 1850, 1860, Text p. 8.
- <sup>33</sup>Daily News and Herald, 4/5, 1866, p. 3/2, Savannah Morning News, 3/3, 1871, p. 3, C. 1, text pp. 8, 13.
- <sup>34</sup>Census 1850, 1860.
- <sup>35</sup>Savannah Morning News, 7/29, 1875, p. 3, C. 4/5, Daily News and Herald, 2/8, 1878, p. 3, C. 2.
- <sup>36</sup>Savannah Morning News, 1/31, 1877, p. 3, C. 4, 4/17, 1888, p. 3, C. 2.
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid. 4/17, 1888, p. 3, C. 2.
- <sup>38</sup>City Directory, 1879, 1881, 1883.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid. 1884, p. 207.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid. 1885, 1886, 1888, Savannah Morning News 4/17, 1888, p. 8, C. 2.

<sup>41</sup>City Directory, 1889, 1890.

<sup>42</sup>Census, 1850, 1860, Savannah Morning News, 11/14, 1878, 5/23, 1879, p. 3, C. 2, 4/11, 1879, p. 3, C. 3.

<sup>43</sup>City Directory, passim.

<sup>44</sup>Savannah Morning News, 11/30, 1921, p. 12, C. 5, 12/2, 1921, p. 2, C. 5, text pp. 8, 10, 11, 13.

<sup>45</sup>City Directory, 1890, p. 187.

<sup>46</sup>Savannah Morning News, 4/17, 1888, p. 8, C. 2.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid. 4/17, 1890, p. 8, C. 1, text p. 13.

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